

The Letter from James

*. Who wrote the letter?

This letter appears to have been written by James, the brother of Jesus. We know that James became one of the leaders of the church in Jerusalem as described in Acts. He was a man of authority among Jewish Christians. Of interest is the fact that he never identifies himself as the brother of Jesus nor does he refer directly to Jesus. Most believe that this was done out of humility – and also those who knew him knew of his relationship to Jesus so he didn't need to mention it.

*. When was it written?

The letter appears to be the earliest New Testament book/letter in our Bible. James wrote it about 49 a.d. – just about 20 years after Jesus was crucified.

*. To whom was it written?

In the opening verses, the letter is addressed “to the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad.” This is a reference to Jewish Christians who are scattered throughout the Roman Empire. Most the church gatherings were still meeting within the synagogue at this time.

*. Why was it written?

James is writing to help the new Christians understand that their lives must demonstrate their relationship with Jesus Christ. They were claiming to have faith but were not demonstrating it. So, James wrote to let them know that a person is indeed saved by faith, but saving faith truly transforms a person's life. A person who is in a relationship with Jesus (saved) will live like a saved person. Some see that this book contradicts Paul's teaching on “salvation by faith plus nothing.” In reality, both Paul and James agree – a person is saved by faith but a saved person will demonstrate faith in all of life.

*. What is the main topic?

The Christian life must be demonstrated by everyday living.

James 1:1-8:

¹ James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad: Greetings. ² Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, ³ knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. ⁴ And let endurance have *its* perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. ⁵ But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. ⁶ But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. ⁷ For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, ⁸ *being* a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

James 1:27:

²⁷ Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of *our* God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, *and* to keep oneself unstained by the world.

James 2:14-26:

¹⁴ What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him? ¹⁵ If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, ¹⁶ and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled," and yet you do not give them what is necessary for *their* body, what use is that? ¹⁷ Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, *being* by itself. ¹⁸ But someone may *well* say, "You have faith and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works." ¹⁹ You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder. ²⁰ But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless? ²¹ Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar? ²² You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected; ²³ and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "AND ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS," and he was called the friend of God. ²⁴ You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone. ²⁵ In the same way, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? ²⁶ For just as the body without *the* spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.

